PECULIARITIES OF INSTRUMENTAL NOUNS IN THAI

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This paper aims to show that a prepositional phrase signifying *Instrumental Adverb* does not exist in deep structure as has been assumed by a number of transformational grammarians. I will argue that the instrumental prepositional phrase in Thai is transformationally derived from another source of basic structure, that is, from a sentence containing *chây* ‘to use’. I fully realize that an instrumental noun does not play a significant role in the Thai language as it does in some Indo-European and American Indian languages, where instrumental forms are overtly signified. It is amazing how Thai speakers can sort out the instrumental nouns in surface structure from other patient nouns, as both superficially appear in the same position in a sentence, for example:

(1) a. khâw kin tàkîap  
he eat chopstick  
He eats with chopsticks.

   b. khâw kin kûaytîaw  
he eat noodle  
He is eating noodles.

(2) a. khâw khîan mî+ sâay  
he write hand left  
He writes with his left hand.

   b. khâw khîan cômâyay  
he write letter  
He is writing a letter.

(3) a. khâw hûŋ thàan  
she cook charcoal  
She cooks with charcoal.
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b. khāw hūŋ khāaw
   she cook rice
   She is cooking rice.

(4) a. khāw yiŋ pīn
   he shoot gun
   He is shooting (by using a gun).

b. khāw yiŋ nōk
   he shoot bird
   He shot a bird.

(5) a. khāw yēp cāk
   he sew machine
   He sews.

b. khāw yēp sā
   she sew blouse
   She is sewing a blouse.

(6) a. khāw thaa lípsātīk
   she paint lipstick
   She puts on lipstick.

b. khāw thaa nāa
   she paint face
   She paints her face.

It is evident that (1a), (2a), (3a), (4a), (5a), and (6a) contain an instrumental noun while (1b), (2b), (3b), (4b), (5b), and (6b) contain a patient noun in the surface structure.

Deep Structure of Instrumental Nouns

Neither Fillmore (1968) nor Chafe (1970) distinguishes two kinds of instrumental nouns as is proposed in this paper. Fillmore (1968) considers an instrumental case as "the case of the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by a verb."
Peculiarities of Instrumental Nouns

Chafe (1970) considers "an instrument being some object which plays a role in bringing a process about, but which is not the motivating force, the cause or the instigator. It is subsidiary to the agent—something which the agent uses."

Let us consider the following sentences:

(7) a. khâw chây tàkìap kin khâaw
    he use chopstick eat rice
    He uses chopsticks to eat rice.

b. khâw kin khâaw dúay tàkìap
    he eat rice with chopstick
    He eats rice with chopsticks.

c. khâw kin tàkìap
    he eat chopstick
    He eats with chopsticks.

(8) a. khâw chây thâaw pàet pratuu
    he use foot open door
    He uses his foot to open the door.

b. khâw pàet pratuu dúay thâaw
    he open door with foot
    He opens the door with his foot.

c. khâw pàet thâaw⁶
    he open foot
    He uncovers his foot.

Note that (7a), (7b), and (7c) are related, but (8c) is not related to (8a) and (8b), and thâaw ‘foot’ is not an instrumental noun as tàkìap ‘chopstick’ is in (7c). There is parallelism between (7a) and (8a), (7b) and (8b), but not between (7c) and (8c). I propose that the sentence underlying (7a), (7b), and (7c) is different from the sentence underlying (8a) and (8b).
NP₁ must be animate and NP₂ must be inanimate. The noun following chây ‘to use’ will be an instrumental noun as follows:

(10) \[ X\ NP₁\ chây\ NP₂\ NP₃\ Y \rightarrow X\ NP₁\ chây\ NP₂\ NP₃\ Y \]
     \[ [+\text{inst1}] \]
     if \( NP₁ = NP₃ \)

(11) \[ X\ NP₁\ chây\ NP₂\ NP₃\ Y \rightarrow X\ NP₁\ chây\ NP₂\ NP₃\ Y \]
     \[ [+\text{inst2}] \]
     if \( NP₂ = NP₃ \)

The feature [+instrumental 1] will be incorporated in NP₂ if NP₁ is the same as NP₃, and the feature [+instrumental 2] if NP₂ is the same as NP₃.

Let us consider the deep structure of (7a).

(12) khăw chây tàkïap khăw kin khâaw
     he use chopstick he eat rice

By applying rule (10), tàkïap ‘chopstick’ in (12) will be assigned [+instrumental 1] because NP₁, the one who uses chopsticks, and NP₃, the one who eats rice, are the same person.

Let us also consider the deep structure of (8a).
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(13) khâw chây tháaw tháaw pêât pratuu
    he use foot foot open door

By applying rule (11), thâaw ‘foot’ in (13) will be assigned [+instrumental 2] because NP₂, the instrument the agent (NP₁) uses, is the same as NP₃, the instrument that opens the door.⁷

By applying the identical NP deletion transformation to (12) and (13), (7a) and (8a) will be respectively obtained.

(14) X NP₁ chây NP₂ V NP₄ Y → X NP₁ V (NP₄) dûay NP₂ Y

(15) X NP₁ V (NP₄) dûay NP₂ Y → X NP₁ V NP₂ Y
    [+inst 1]        [+inst 1]

Note that both (7a) and (8a) will undergo rule (14), yielding (7b) and (8b), respectively. Only (7b), not (8b), can undergo rule (15) because NP₂ of (8b) does not contain the [+instrumental 1] feature as of (7b). It also must be noted that dûay ‘with’ in (15) will be deleted together with NP₄ or when there is no NP₄ preceding it. The following sentences are ungrammatical.

(16) *khâw kin khâaw tàkìap
    he eat rice chopstick

(17) *khâw pêât pratuu tháaw
    he open door foot

In order for (2a), (3a), (4a), (5a), and (6a) to be derived, they must undergo rule (14) and rule (15).
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Conclusion

It is obvious that chây ‘to use’ plus an instrumental inanimate noun are the source for Instrumental Adverb or instrumental prepositional phrase in the Thai language. I am certain that Manner Adverb in Thai does not belong to deep structure either.8

Notes

1. This work was supported by the Council for International Exchange of Scholars and the University of Pittsburgh. The research was conducted at the University of Pittsburgh when I was appointed Visiting Professor of Linguistics and Asian Studies in 1979–80. I wish to thank Professor Edward M. Anthony for arranging my visit to the University of Pittsburgh and Ramkhamhaeng University for granting my leave of absence.

2. Chomsky (1965) includes prepositional phrases (Prep–phrase) in the deep structure but it is not clear that he has an instrumental prepositional phrase in mind. Lakoff (1968:5) states that “it has been maintained throughout traditional grammar that simple sentences may contain not only subjects, predicates, and objects, but also a full range of adverbials modifying the predicate. To date, this position has been carried over into transformational grammar.”

3. There are many uses of chây ‘to use’ among Thai speakers, for example:

    khâw chây lûuk kaw làŋ
    he use son scratch back
    He told his son to scratch his back.

    Lûuk ‘son or daughter’, which is an animate noun, is not an instrumental noun.

4. Fillmore (1968:24). I would like to remind the readers of the existence of a sentence like

    phôm chây chiwít khâŋ phôm tham ṇaan hây prathêetchâat
    I use life of I do work give country
    I spend my life working for the country.

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To me, chiwít ‘life’ is an animate noun and it can be used as an instrumental noun as well. I wonder whether chiwít ‘life’ will contradict the definition given by a number of authors.

5. Chafe (1970:152–55) feels that an instrument seems to resemble agents in his English examples but it also resembles patients in Thai, as in (1–6).

6. Thaaw ‘foot’ in (8c) is a patient, and the meaning of pəet in (8c) is not the same as pəet in pəet pratuu ‘to open the door’ in (8a) and (8b). It roughly means ‘to uncover’.

7. Note that it is not the person who opens the door, but his foot. Thus, I do not consider NP₃ to be the same as NP₁.

8. Lakoff (1965) attempts to argue that many adverbs, including manner adverbs, are transformationally derived from other, more basic structures.

References


